

**i was the last thing on your mind; i know you better
than you think by ceruleanstorm**

Series: [should i stay or should i go; \[3\]](#)

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Summary:

prompt: "she's missing, not dead" + Barb.

Nancy never gives up hope.

i was the last thing on your mind; i know you better than you think

Author's Note:

Although I do believe in canon Barb is dead (a moment of silence for Barb) this was the prompt sent, and I actually had a lot of fun with it. Hope you enjoy! :)

prompt: "she's missing, not dead" + barb

Nancy doesn't believe Eleven. She *can't* believe Eleven. Barb's... Barb's *gone*? Gone? What does that even mean? What the *hell* does it mean?

Angry tears stinging her eyes, Nancy sits in the hall outside the gym, feeling smaller than she's ever felt. She replays the memory of Eleven, floating around in their DIY sensory deprivation tank, as Nancy's last hope dissolves as this girl- this girl *Mike* was someone how hiding in their basement for the past week?- pronounces Barb "gone."

Gone, Nancy gulps, as in dead?

Anger fills her like a sickness. What happened to all that talk about graduating as Valedictorian and Salutatorian and giving speeches together at the ceremony? They were going to go to Harvard together, and get a dorm like they always planned and Barb was going to double major in physics and chemistry and Nancy was going to major in biology. Barb had a whole notebook of experiments for them to try when they got there, and Nancy had planned the trips of

all the places they would go when they got their doctorates, of all the people they were going to help. All the lives they were going to make better, together.

Nancy blinks her eyes rapidly; when they were twelve, they picked out their wedding dresses and the dress the other one would wear, pinky swearing they'd be each other's bridesmaids.

And now all of her plans, *their* plans were dissolving like the salt in Eleven's bathtub.

No. She can't think like that. She *won't* think like that. Barb deserves better, and right now she needs Nancy to be strong. She bites her lip and swallows the lump in her throat and shakes her head so furiously that strands of her brown frizz escape her pony tail. Barb always said she was jealous of Nancy's hair, and it's at this thought, this memory, that the first tear she's been fighting so hard against escapes her wet eyes.

"She's missing," Nancy tells herself, wishing it so hard like it was a prayer. She hasn't prayed in a long time. "She's *not* dead."

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They- Joyce and Hopper get Will back. Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve-oddly enough- light the bastard monster up in spectacular flames, but it doesn't fill the aching emptiness in her chest.

Eleven is gone. Nancy doesn't know how, and she really doesn't understand why. But she does recognize the look on her brother's

face as they sit in the hospital waiting for Will Byers, the miracle, to wake up.

In the weeks that follow, she can't face Jonathan, or any of the Byers. The empty ache comes back full force every time she passes and ignores Jonathan in the hall at school; he has no idea how lucky he is. He won't ever know or understand what she feels. She can only hope that he does not underestimate what the universe has given him back, that there is not a second he begins to take it for granted. This continues until Steve suggests they replace his camera, and proudly presents Nancy his first paycheck from his new job at the movie theatre. Like always, she calls him an idiot but goes shopping for the camera the next day.

She's forced to face him when she gives it to him the night before Christmas, just as she's forced to face that this year she bought Jonathan Byers a Christmas present, but not Barbara Holland one.

Nancy still holds that Jonathan could never understand, but in a way, her younger brother does. He holds onto Eleven's radio and keeps the blanket fort up, the way Nancy keeps the notebook of experiments and the magazine clippings of the dress she picked for Barb under her pillow. Watching him, and the circles slowly darkening under her eyes, Nancy begins to realize the destructive power of hope.

"She's missing, not dead" becomes a mantra in the Wheeler house, replacing nighttime prayers and reasons to keep moving forward.

Nancy doesn't go to Harvard.

Spring haunts Hawkins, the sticky humidity of June on the horizon, when she graduates at the end of that year. Her acceptance letter to Indiana University sits on her desk, worn at the edges from being read over and over. Nancy had the grades and the gaul for Harvard, she had all the volunteer hours and all of the extracurriculars and the Valedictorian title she needed. She was cut from Harvard cloth, her counselor had told her that spring, but she decides to stay in the state for a myriad of reasons. IU is closer, the Bloomington campus only a 45 minute drive. Holly and Mike- they're going to grow up and she needs to be close to them. She knows this more than ever. Especially for Mike. But Nancy doesn't go because she can't go without Barb. They always said they would go together, and without her here, Harvard was a useless mock of dream to Nancy.

She goes into journalism after failing her biology classes and graduates from IU four years later, floating from newspaper to newspaper, acting as an editor or columnist or anonymous source. Nancy attacks writing with a passion and a hunger she's never known, as if her words could somehow bring justice to those who have been dealt an ugly hand.

1989 marks the beginning of the end of the decade, when out of the fog Jonathan Byers shows up, a ghost at the door of her apartment in Bloomington. His face is as white as a sheet and then he's showing her photographs he's taken. Ones of grotesque creatures hiding and cowering in shadows, like the one that so many years ago stole the ones they loved. It's been awhile since they've spoken, coming up on six years, and he tells hers he's been traveling the country, his camera- *the* camera at his side. Choking on his words, he tells her about the photographs. There are more monsters. There are more conspiracies, more cover ups, more experiments, more stolen loved ones. He came to her knowing she was the only one who'd believe him, and the next thing Nancy knows, she's tossing her whole life in

Bloomington into her old Camaro's trunk, and armed with only a pencil and pistol, she's following Jonathan Byers state to state, finding monsters. Finding blinking christmas lights and lost children.

There is a mother in front of her now, crying and sobbing into the arms of her concerned husband, begging because no one will listen to her. Her tone is all too familiar. Nancy can hear her own cries for help in the woman's breaking voice. Jonathan's hands are on the barrel of the gun hooked to his belt as he walks up and down the ruins of a house in turmoil. Kneeling, Nancy takes the mother's curled fingers into her own and tells her the words that have saved the lives of so many. The words that she has seen come to life like a prophecy, right before her eyes time after time.

The words that tell the story of a young boy who is sitting at his dining room table filling out college applications because his mother and new stepfather literally went through hell to save him. One strange girl, hired as one of Hawkins' newest librarians, smiling at her desk because every day her boyfriend comes and brings her flowers and waffles. The old friend who sits in Harvard lectures, like she always said she would, studying physics and chemistry, and still bothers to call Nancy everyone in awhile, when of course, Nancy's not hunting monsters.

"Your daughter is missing," Nancy smiles at the mother, "she's not dead."

Author's Note:

should i stay or should i go; track 3: explosions by
ellie goulding